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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5741  
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0302  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9996  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6972  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5050  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3633  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0794  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3719  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1030  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2799  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7547  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5249  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0155  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1930  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000484

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2017

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FRESH FIGHTING IN NORTHWEST COASTAL  
AREA OF MANNAR

REF: COLOMBO 483

Classified By: DCM James Moore, for reasons 1.4(b, d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On March 23, Government security forces attacked Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) mortar positions inside LTTE territory. The activity took place at approximately 10:00 am in an area east of Mannar on the northwest coast. The attacks penetrated about two kilometers into LTTE-held territory. Ambassador spoke with Foreign Secretary (and Peace Secretariat head) Palitha Kohona to

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express serious concern over approximately 50,000 civilians living in the area who may become displaced by the new hostilities. End Summary.

12. (C) Beginning at 10:00 am local time, government security forces began attacking LTTE positions approximately two kilometers inside LTTE-controlled territory, about twenty kilometers east of the town of Mannar. Both sides claim to have inflicted casualties on the opposition. Sri Lankan military sources reported to DATT that they had losses of three killed and seven wounded on their side. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) stated that they received a communication from the LTTE yesterday afternoon, March 22, claiming that the government was advancing into "LTTE territory." The SLMM has been unable to verify casualties. SLMM could not confirm claims by the LTTE that the security forces are "using civilians as human shields," as reported by Reuters.

13. (C) Ambassador spoke with Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona about today's fighting in Mannar. Kohona claimed the LTTE had moved heavy weapons into the area, threatening the causeway to the Mannar peninsula, and explained that the military took action to neutralize the threat. Ambassador replied that the UN and others in the international community

were upset over the GSL's handling of its recent attacks on LTTE positions in Toppigala (in the East) because they had created a large number of IDPs for whom there had been no advance planning. Ambassador warned that there were up to 50,000 persons in the area of today's fighting who could become displaced if the hostilities escalate. (Note: as reported reftel, Ambassador was in Mannar on March 23 to meet with civil society members and the Sri Lankan military to assess the humanitarian and security situation.) Ambassador cautioned Kohona that the military should avoid shelling because of the large concentration of civilians there. Ambassador also made the point about avoiding shelling in areas where numbers of civilians are present to Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa in a meeting later on March 23.

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14. (C) COMMENT: This is not a frontal assault on LTTE lines. Rather, it represents an escalation of activity by Sri Lankan Army long-range patrols that have been probing into the southern part of the Tiger-held Vanni for weeks. In DAO's assessment, these sorts of engagements by Sri Lankan army small units will continue for some time. Sources in the Indian High Commission concur with this view. Security forces may intend to clear portions of the northwest coastal areas in the same way that they have recently cleared areas in the East. This could result in a humanitarian crisis in the northwest similar to that in the East, albeit on a smaller scale. The government will likely use small unit attacks over a longer period of time vice an all-out conventional linear attack to achieve control over northern areas.  
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